



## The “Happy Island Girls” are back at the Renaissance; their “Home away from home”

The Renaissance Ocean Suites are host to many long time repeat visitors to Aruba, but one group of women, some of which have been coming to the island for more than twenty-five years have formed a special bond with their “home away from home.”

They have dubbed themselves the “Happy Island Girls” and though most hail from Syracuse, New York, they have their “extended Aruban family,” which includes Lynne Niebling of Randolph, Utah. Each year Lynne designs a new tee shirt or beach top the women wear and keep, reminding them of their visit. Most spend nearly a month on Aruba, twice a year.

Sue Esposito is spending her first year on Aruba, but veteran visitors Marlene Linsky, Audrey Houser, Debbie Rohe, and sisters Rosalie Licitra and Joanne Rohe are showing her all the best island. Not only have they introduced their children to Aruba, but also often three generations of their families are vacationing here.

Though the women may give differing opinions and a long list of what makes this island “the best,” such as “the weather, great nightlife, fabulous restaurants, and the beautiful beaches” they all agree with Audrey’s assertion that Aruba’s greatest asset is “its people.”

The “Happy Island Girls” in particular have had the opportunity to get to know the Arubans as they live everyday, away from the “tourist scene,” as have many other island visitors that return to the island repeatedly. Audrey describes how one night in the casino she performed a ritual her mother taught her of getting up and walking around her chair as a way to change her lackluster luck for the better. It didn’t work for her, but Ulrich Ponson and his wife Adriane were sitting next to her, and his luck drastically improved, prompting him to dub Audrey “The Dance Lady” and to encourage her to continue her strange behavior. A friendship was forged that soon extended to the entire group when Ulrich called them two days later and invited the women to join his family on a bus tour they had arranged around the island for some guests from Holland.

Audrey reports that she couldn’t believe they would really pick up the “Happy Island Girls” at their resort the next day, but at 7:00 A.M. the bus pulled up, and the group of women had what they describe “as the most memorable day in Aruba all the time we had vacationed here.”

Over the years, they have only grown closer and Ulrich and his family have become a part of their lives in too many ways to count. They pick up the women when they arrive on the island and take them to the airport when they depart. Ulrich’s parents Emma and Ildo welcome “The Happy Island Girls” to their home every year for a big family barbecue bash. When Audrey’s daughter Lori had her first baby, she could not reach her mother at the resort, so she called Ulrich instead, and he was the first to inform Audrey that she had just become a grandmother, though he wisely left Lori to give her the details that it was a boy. Over the years, they have also welcomed Ulrich and his wife into their homes in the States on various visits.

“The Happy Island Girls” have good reason to call Aruba their “Home away from Home” and to consider Ulrich and others they have come to know as “their Aruban Family.” Having owned timesharing at the Renaissance Beach Suites since preconstruction, they have even been involved in naming the beach bar and seeing the island and that area develop, making them feel a part of the process. Every year on the island establishes a new tradition for them, one of which is getting their picture in THE NEWS!